

Music Improves Morning Transitions for Children with Autism

DOES MUSIC HAVE THE POWER TO TRANSFORM? For children with autism it just might. A study to be published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* showed that when two children with autism were greeted by their teacher with a song highlighting the morning routine, their ability to independently complete that routine increased. Songs helped the children enter the classroom, greet the teacher and classmates, and engage in play.

The Challenge of Transitions

Transitions are difficult for most young children. Anyone entering a child care setting has witnessed a child in tears clinging to a parent, noted the amount of time it takes to get children outside to play, or watched the chaos that can ensue at snack time. As hard as these transitions may be for typically developing children, they are often exacerbated for those with autism.

Previous research has identified three strategies that help children with autism successfully transition from one activity to the next: structure and predictable routines, visual cues, and songs. While findings demonstrate that music therapy can be beneficial, it was unclear the effect it might have on children's morning arrival routine. This study is the first to examine the effect of greeting songs on the performance of young children with autism. It addressed the following questions:

- Does the use of an individually composed song, sung by teachers, increase appropriate independent performance during the morning arrival routine of young children with autism?
- Can classroom teachers apply the principles important to music therapy in a particular routine?
- Does use of the song increase interactions between the child with autism and his peers?



DOES THE USE OF AN INDIVIDUALLY COMPOSED SONG INCREASE INDEPENDENT PERFORMANCE DURING THE MORNING ARRIVAL ROUTINE OF YOUNG CHILDREN WITH AUTISM?

Petra Kern, an author of the study, wrote a greeting song for each boy. The music was composed to match the child's personality and the lyrics included five steps that were part of the morning routine. The boys were expected to:

- Enter the classroom independently,
- Greet a teacher or classmate,
- Greet a second teacher or classmate,
- Wave goodbye to their caregiver, and
- Engage in appropriate play.

Kern taught the caregivers and teachers the songs she composed. In addition, she used circle time in each classroom to teach the song to each child's classmates.

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